

REMEMBERING LOST CLASSMATES

Vets remind students of sacrifice

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ENCINITAS — Years of researching the names and personal histories of San Dieguito High School alumni killed in the nation's wars have left a swarm of incidental details floating through David Gonzales' head.

For instance, most of the dead were Protestant; some were Catholic.

And it wasn't until Vietnam that the first Marine to have attended San Dieguito died. He was 1st Lt.

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VETS

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James Mitchell, a classmate and friend of Gonzales in the class of 1960, and "one of the best basketball players ever at 5-5."

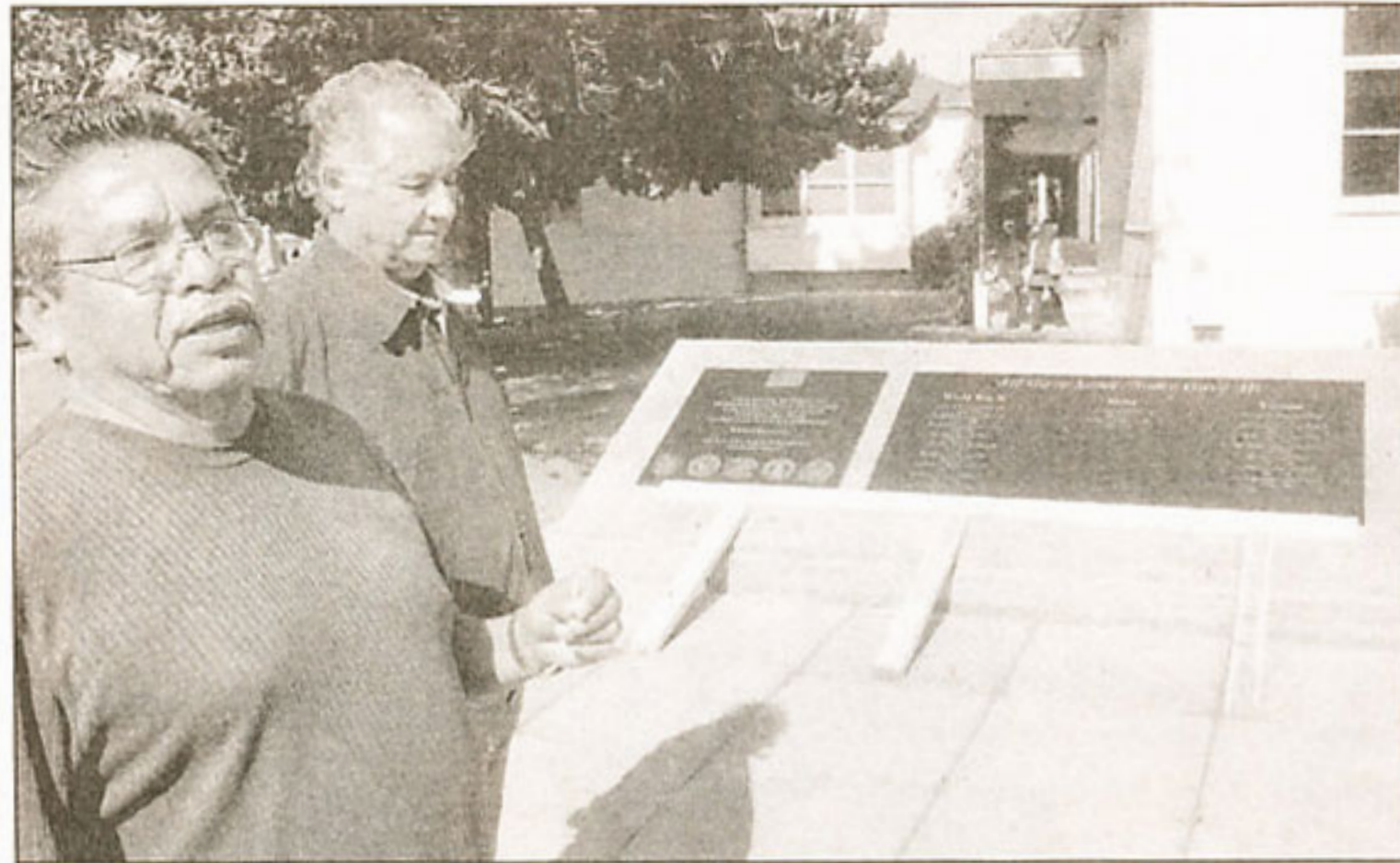
On Tuesday, the local veterans group Gonzales started will dedicate a memorial it built on the campus for those fallen veterans that attended San Dieguito High School, which has since been re-named San Dieguito Academy.

Eighteen names adorn the black granite surface of the 3-by-8-foot plaque that reads, "All Gave Some, Some Gave All." Nine names are listed from World War II, two from Korea, and seven from Vietnam, where Gonzales served as an Air Force sergeant in Danang.

"This has been three years in the making and 14 years in my head," said Gonzales, 61, now a property clerk at the Cal State San Marcos library.

The idea struck Gonzales in 1989 at his 30th reunion, where he learned his classmate Navy Lt. j.g. Michael Zerbe had been killed in 1965 while fighting in Vietnam. Gonzales said he immediately promised himself to honor Zerbe and the other classmates who perished in combat.

He later started the San Dieguito High School Veterans, hosting twice-a-year golf tournaments to help raise money for a memorial. By 2001, the organization had received most of the \$13,000 needed to build the memorial, which Gonzales envisioned as a granite obelisk outside the school's gymnasium.



BILL WECHTER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Chairman of San Dieguito High School Veterans David Gonzales, left, and Sam Hernandez, president of the organization, stand near the new veterans memorial at San Dieguito Academy last week.

First design scrapped

That design was eventually scrapped for the plaques laid on a cement base at the entrance to the school.

"They didn't want it to look like a cemetery," said Gonzales.

But when he approached the San Dieguito Union High School District with his idea early in 2001, administrators were less than enthusiastic, saying kids "would not have any positive connection with these individuals." Furthermore, they added, the district did not have any guidelines by which they could consider Gonzales' request.

They encouraged him, however, to take his idea to the board, which quickly embraced the project and asked administrators to draft a policy governing such requests.

Since then, said Gonzales, the district has been nothing but supportive of the memorial. Likewise, Superintendent Peggy Lynch said she is happy to see the project finally come to fruition after so many

years.

The veterans group now plans to start a scholarship program for district students. Each year, the name of the scholarship would rotate through the cycle of the dead, from Air Force Sgt. Jerry Archer, who died in 1945, to Army Capt. Joseph Tworek, killed in 1971.

"That's just another reason why they'll never be forgotten," said Gonzales.

But the realities of how war and death have touched Encinitas perhaps have never been so openly displayed, and it remains to be seen what the simple slates will convey to students at San Dieguito

"Most kids aren't touched by this stuff," said George Milne, a San Dieguito history teacher who helped with the memorial's design. "Hopefully, this will touch them."

Students wandering by the monument as it was being completed earlier this week had mixed reactions.

"It's a good idea," said John Gail III, 16, adding that

the solemn, black granite slabs reminded him of the Vietnam memorial in Washington and the Pearl Harbor memorial in Hawaii. This one, however, was more personal. "You've got a long list of names on the plaques in Hawaii, but you wouldn't know where they lived. It's great to show that local people have cared for their country."

Curious students

Other curious students stopped to take in the new addition to the landscape at the front of their campus, but were less than pleased.

Julian Neves, a senior at San Dieguito, said he understood why the memorial was erected, but simply disagreed with it.

"The people who are here lost their lives, and they de-

serve to be respected," said Neves. "But on the other hand, they went to war, and so what did they expect to happen?"

Neves added the memorial would be more suited to a local park and that it was wrong to focus solely on those who died fighting for the United States while ignoring those who were killed by American troops.

Gonzales said he has heard it all before and feels such criticism misses the point of why a small group of people would dedicate so many hours, so many years of their lives, to such a project.

"They think what we're doing is glorifying war, which is totally wrong," he said. "It's about not forgetting."

Besides, adds Gonzales, many of those killed during the wars never wanted to go

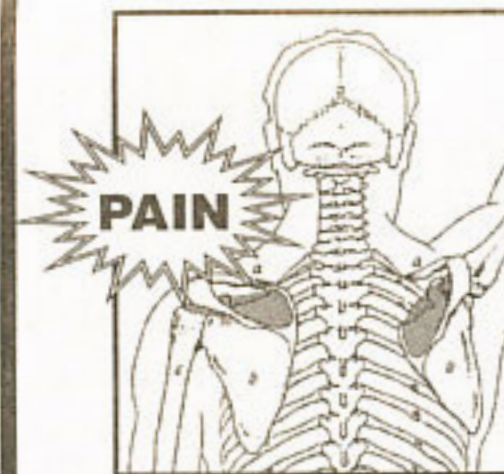
off to fight but were either drafted or found few options awaiting them after high school.

"In my day, you either went into the Army or went surfing," he said. "There was no work in this area."

Over the years, each student will, of course, form an individual opinion about the memorial and the lives it represents.

There will be empathy, disagreement, indifference. But Gonzales said he hopes the greatest lesson students draw from passing the memorial each day on their way to classes is that, regrettably, life's harsh realities await each one of them once they leave San Dieguito.

"History repeats itself," he said. "We'll have another (war). That's why there's the space at the bottom."



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